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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 001635

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/PI AND ALINA ROMANOWSKI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [YM](#) [DEMOCRATIC REFORM](#)

SUBJECT: DEMOCRACY IN ACTION: TEACHERS DEMONSTRATE AGAINST
OPPOSITION HARDLINERS

REF: SANAA 1611

[11.](#) (U) Summary: The Al-Quds Girls Public School in Sanaa received a computer lab with brand-new equipment through a Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) grant. After an American Embassy delegation visited the school, reports appeared in local newspapers stating that the female principal forced the students to uncover their heads for the delegation. During Friday sermons at local mosques two opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) denounced the principal demanding her ousting and encouraging other mosques to do so as well, and advocated mandating the "hijab" (veil) and a more conservative uniform for female students. In response, the school principal rallied a large number of teachers to resist publicly the hard-line MPs' efforts. End Summary.

MEPI HELPS SPARK DEBATE

[12.](#) (U) On April 6, the Ambassador opened a MEPI-funded e-learning Internet Classroom at the Al-Quds Girls School, a local public school. After the inauguration, visiting MEPI officers and American Embassy staff accompanied the school principal to visit a few of the classrooms to talk to the students about their science education, textbooks, requests for improving their educational experience, etc. A local newspaper later reported that some of the schoolgirls claimed that the principal demanded they uncover their heads for the delegation.

[13.](#) (SBU) On the following Friday, imams Shaykh Hazza'a Al-Maswari and Shaykh Mohammed Al-Hazmi, both Members of Parliament affiliated with the opposition Islah Party, denounced the principal and demanded she be removed from her post. (Note: Al-Hazmi has also made anti-American statements and Emboffs have been informed that a government committee is being formed to investigate the al-Hazmi issue, see reftel.) On May 18, newspapers came out on both sides of the issue. Al-Balagh (independent Arabic weekly) wrote an op-ed piece calling for the dismissal of the principal. Al-Meethaq (GPC-affiliated Arabic weekly) criticized inaccurate information circulated by some press regarding the Al-Quds school and the Islah-affiliated imams for allegedly slandering the principal. It also noted that the principal has filed an anti-slander lawsuit in court against the press.

[14.](#) (U) Al-Motamar Net (GPC-affiliated Arabic news website) reported on June 13 that the Al-Quds school e-learning issue had turned into a political argument between the ruling party, the General People's Congress Party (GPC), and the opposition Islah Party. According to the site, claims that the principal forced girl students to unveil were manipulated by Islah to institute more conservative public school uniforms.

TEACHERS DEMONSTRATE AGAINST MPs

[15.](#) (U) On June 9, female teachers staged a demonstration, marching to Parliament to protest offensive statements allegedly made by the two MPs. (Note: Press estimates of the crowd range from "hundreds" to two thousand to 20 thousand.) As reported in the Yemen Observer (independent English weekly) June 12 issue, the demonstrators asked Parliament to strip the two men of their parliamentary immunity and bring them to justice for the insults they allegedly directed at the principal and certain schoolteachers. A press statement issued by the protesters stated that the two MPs launched a campaign of slander against female teachers and the girls, school principal as a ploy to impose more conservative uniforms in public schools, including the hijab.

[16.](#) (U) According to a few press reports, some of the teachers did not know why they were marching. When informed by press of the subject of the demonstration, some teachers allegedly disagreed with the demonstration's organizers and withdrew from the protest. Others confessed that they had taken part in the rally under threat of salary reductions. The families of the female students marched in counter-protest. Reports indicated they were organized by the Islah Party to protest

the GPC's campaign to institute a more liberal school uniform, which would leave the girls, faces uncovered.

17. (SBU) DCM and PD Chief met with the Minister of Education Abdul Salam al-Jowfi, who said that the Internet classrooms were not the issue in the dispute. In fact, information gathered by PD showed that the problem arose prior to the e-learning classroom inauguration.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: While the MEPI program did not directly encourage this democratic action, American presence in the schools was exploited to garner public support against the GPC-supported school principal. The teachers' demonstration against parliamentary pressure is an example of Yemen's nascent democracy. End Comment.

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